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HEARING DATE: Oct. 11, 2022
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**UNITED STATES BANKRUPTCY COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON**

In re

EASTERDAY RANCHES, INC., *et al.*

Debtors.¹

Chapter 11

Lead Case No. 21-00141-WLH11
Jointly Administered

**REPLY IN SUPPORT OF FINAL
APPLICATION OF PACHULSKI
STANG ZIEHL & JONES LLP FOR
COMPENSATION AND
REIMBURSEMENT OF EXPENSES FOR**

¹ The Debtors along with their case numbers are as follows: Easterday Ranches, Inc. (21-00141) and Easterday Farms, a Washington general partnership (21-00176).

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4 Pachulski Stang Ziehl & Jones LLP (“PSZJ”), attorneys for Easterday Ranches,
5 Inc. (“Ranches”) and Easterday Farms (“Farms”), debtors and debtors in possession (the
6 “Debtors”), hereby files this reply (this “Reply”) to the *Objection to Fourth Interim Fee*
7 *Application of Pachulski, Stang, Ziehl, & Jones* [Docket No. 1783] and *Supplement to*
8 *Objection to Fourth Interim Fee Application of Pachulski, Stang, Ziehl, & Jones; and*
9 *Objection to Final Fee Application* [Docket No. 1865] (the “Objections”) filed by the
10 Acting United States Trustee (the “UST”), and in support of the *Fifth Interim and Final*
11 *Application of Pachulski Stang Ziehl & Jones LLP for Compensation and*
12 *Reimbursement of Expenses for The Period February 1, 2021 Through August 1, 2022*
13 [Docket No. 1850] (the “Application”).² In support of this Reply, PSZJ respectfully
14 represents as follows:

15 I.

16 PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

17 The UST’s Objection is a rehashed argument premised upon PSZJ having a
18 purported conflict of interest due to its joint representation of the two related Debtors,
19 Farms and Ranches, during the negotiation with third parties of their combined chapter
20 11 plan. The UST now contends that this “conflict” was a disqualifying one but did not
21 in fact seek to disqualify PSZJ from representing the Debtors when the purported
22 “conflict” surfaced. Nor has the UST sought to disqualify or reduce the fees of the
23 Debtors’ other professionals despite the fact that their joint representations of the
24 Debtors presumably have suffered from the same debilitating conflict. Only now, after
25 PSZJ’s efforts helped the Debtors to achieve a universally lauded solution to these

26 ² Capitalized terms not otherwise defined herein shall have the meanings ascribed thereto in the Application.

1 cases, has the UST objected to PSZJ's fees specifically to the extent that they were
2 incurred in the negotiation of the very global settlement that paved the way for
3 confirmation of a fully consensual plan that provides for 100% recovery of Farms'
4 creditors and had the support of the Easterday family. Importantly, as discussed below,
5 PSZJ's duties ran to Farms not its creditors and shareholders and all proposed plans
6 accorded with PSZJ's fiduciary responsibilities. While Bankruptcy Code section 328(c)
7 serves as a gatekeeper on counsel that fails to disclose or adequately address conflicts
8 of interest, the UST's overly rigid reading of Bankruptcy Code section 328(c) is
9 misplaced here: PSZJ was duly employed after full disclosure and a hearing on the
10 merits of the joint representation, and PSZJ has ably and vigorously represented the
11 estates. Each of the other constituencies in this case including Farms' creditors'
12 committee and the Easterdays (i.e. equity holders) were skillfully represented. For the
13 foregoing reasons, and as discussed below, the UST's Objection should be overruled
14 and the Application approved in its entirety.

15 II.

16 **THE UST'S OBJECTION SHOULD BE OVERRULED**

17 **A. The UST's Objection to the Application Is Premised Upon a Non-Existent** 18 **Conflict of Interest.**

19 Section 328(c), by its terms, provides that a court may deny compensation to
20 professionals in certain circumstances. The relevant language of § 328(c) reads:

21 Except as provided in section 327(c), 327(e), or 1107(b) of
22 this title, the court *may* deny allowance of compensation for
23 services and reimbursement of expenses of a professional
24 person employed under section 327 or 1103 of this title if, at
25 any time during such professional person's employment
26 under section 327 or 1103 of this title, such professional
27 person is not a disinterested person, or represents or holds an

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1 interest adverse to the interest of the estate with respect to the
2 matter on which such professional person is employed.³

3 The idiom “interest adverse” is not defined by statute. “Disinterested person,” in
4 turn, is defined but only in similarly opaque terms, as including, *inter alia*, one who
5 does not have “an interest *materially* adverse to the interest of the estate or of any class
6 of creditors or equity security holders.”⁴

7 A generally accepted definition of “adverse interest” is the (1) possession or
8 assertion of an economic interest that would tend to lessen the value of the bankruptcy
9 estate; or (2) possession or assertion of an economic interest that would create either an
10 actual or potential dispute in which the estate is a rival claimant; or (3) possession of a
11 predisposition under circumstances that create a bias against the estate.⁵

12 The Debtors’ proposals for treatment of Farms’ creditors and equity holders in
13 the initial plan negotiations as set forth in the First and Second Amended Plans, is not
14 the concern of section 328(c). As bankruptcy counsel to Farms and Ranches, PSZJ’s
15 fiduciary duties were to Farms and Ranches as entities, not to their principals.⁶ In light
16 of Ranches’ substantive consolidation claim against Farms and other related asset
17 allocation issues, it was in the best interests of the estates of Farms and Ranches – and
18 all constituencies – that a fully consensual plan be negotiated. Any plan proposal that
19 completely ignored Ranches’ substantive consolidation claims against Farms would
20 have been a non-starter to the Ranches creditors’ committee and only have prolonged
21 negotiations or destroyed them altogether.

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23
24 ³ 11 U.S.C. § 328(c) (emphasis added).

25 ⁴ Bankruptcy Code § 101(14), 11 U.S.C. § 101(14) (emphasis added).

26 ⁵ *Dye v. Brown (In re AFI Holding, Inc.)*, 355 B.R. 139, 151 (BAP 9th Cir. 2006).

27 ⁶ *In re Graybill Corp.*, 113 B.R. 966 (Bankr. N.D. Ill. 1990); *In re Wild Horse Enterprises, Inc.*, 136 B.R.
28 830 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 1991) (citing *Graybill*).

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B. The UST's Rigid Construction of Section 328(c) Is Improper.

As noted above, the statute provides that bankruptcy court “may” disallow fees if the standards of Bankruptcy Code section 328(c) are met.⁷ Congress’s use of the word “may” instead of “shall” in the statute makes clear that denial of fees is not mandatory.⁸

Against this backdrop, courts are rightly circumspect about dismissing or replacing a conflicted estate representative during a litigious, complex case.⁹ Counsel, moreover, is at that point in the untenable position of choosing between a solution to resolve the conflict that might not best serve the client (withdrawal and substitution of new counsel for one or more of the debtors) or continuing to provide services in good faith at risk of non-payment. The UST’s proposed rigid enforcement of section 328(c) does not reflect the reality of complex, multiple debtor cases such as these, where creditors’ committees are appointed and constituencies employ their own counsel to avoid prejudice from such conflicts.

⁷ 11 U.S.C. § 328(c).

⁸ *Matter of Haldeman Pipe and Supply Co.*, 417 F.2d 1302, 1305-06 (9th Cir. 1969) (the existence of a dual representation alone does not strip counsel of right to compensation for work performed in good faith for the estate; the bankruptcy court must exercise its discretion); *In re Roberts*, 75 B.R. 402, 413 (D. Utah 1987) (same); *In re Shafer Bros. Constr. Inc.*, 525 B.R. 607, 613-14 (Bankr. N.D. W. Va. 2015) (“The decision whether to deny fees to a professional who is not disinterested is within the discretion of the bankruptcy court.”); *Roberts*, 75 B.R. at 412 (section 328(c) penalty inappropriate where the equities outweighed the need for attorney discipline); see also 3 COLLIER ON BANKRUPTCY ¶ 328.05 (“Because the denial of compensation and reimbursement of expenses after services have been performed may be draconian and inherently unfair, this sanction should not be rigidly applied in the absence of actual injury or prejudice to the debtor’s estate.”).

⁹ *In re BHP, Inc.*, 949 F.2d 1300, 1310 (3d Cir. 1991) (holding that it would be unfair and unsound from a standpoint of administrative efficiency and economy to disqualify a trustee on the basis that he was a “creditor” because he was trustee of multiple debtors that filed claims against each other); *Dye v. Brown (In re AFI Holding, Inc.)*, 530 F.3d 832, 838 (9th Cir. 2008) (in assessing motion to remove chapter 7 trustee due to connections with insiders, a *per se* rule is not appropriate; courts must consider the totality of circumstances that takes into account impact on the estate) (adopting BAP’s reasoning at *Dye v. Brown (In re AFI Holding, Inc.)*, 355 B.R. 139, 151 (BAP 9th Cir. 2006), citing *In re BH P*); *In re OPM Leasing Services, Inc.*, 16 B.R. 932, 938 (Bankr. S.D.N.Y. 1982) (“The realities and practicalities of bankruptcy administration in large, complex cases, such as these, makes it doubtful that a court will sever an established trusteeship over multi-related corporations in cases that are well progressed unless there is a showing of actual, present conflict incapable of any other equitable resolution, especially where, as here, full disclosure of the potential for conflict was made at the outset of appointment.”).

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1 The decision of the Bankruptcy Court for the District of Arizona in *In re Guy*
2 *Apple Masonry Contractor, Inc.*,¹⁰ is instructive. In *Guy Apple Masonry*, on application
3 for payment of fees to counsel for the debtor in possession, the bankruptcy court held
4 that: (i) a proper affidavit and application were to be filed; (ii) the court had the power
5 to enter a *nunc pro tunc* order approving appointment and would determine whether to
6 do so following receipt of said affidavit and application; and (iii) counsel's
7 representation of a related entity was not so materially adverse as to warrant withholding
8 approval of appointment as debtor's counsel, in view of fact that two prior applications
9 for fees had been approved without objection and fact that debtor had proposed a plan
10 calling for 100 percent payment of all creditors, but counsel would not receive payment
11 of further interim or final compensation until plan was confirmed and implemented. In
12 so holding, the court reasoned:

13 **"It cannot be denied that conflicts of interest exist in the**
14 **present case. Both the inter-company unsecured and**
15 **administrative claims create actual conflicts of interest." .**
16 **... "The most compelling reason for the Court's decision**
17 **is the fact debtor has proposed a plan calling for the 100%**
18 **payment of all creditors."** Even at the time of hearing
19 on University Block's motion to dismiss, that entity attempted
20 to justify the propriety of its motion on the grounds the
21 creditors of Guy Apple would be paid 100%. While the
22 debtor's ability to pay creditors in full may be contingent upon
23 the amount of the allowed claims arising from rejection or
24 expiration of the collective bargaining agreement, no one can
25 now say that result is improbable or impossible. Debtor has
26 stated it has a current asset-to-debt ratio of 1.4 to 1 and that
27 Mr. Apple, personally, has committed to supplying at least
28 some of the funds necessary for the plan. It is difficult to see
how the estate will have been prejudiced by this conduct if all
creditors are paid 100%. This lack of prejudice to the estate,

10 45 B.R. 160 (Bankr. D. Ariz. 1984).

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1 coupled with the ability to solve the conflict by the
2 appointment of special counsel, in addition to the factors cited
3 above, leads to the conclusion a formal order approving
4 retention of counsel for the debtor is not prohibited. **The**
5 **primary factors involved in this determination is the lack**
6 **of prejudice to the estate if creditors are paid 100% and**
7 **the ability to cure present conflicts by the appointment of**
8 **special counsel.”¹¹**

9 The Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Florida held similarly in *In re*
10 *General Coffee Corp.*¹² In *General Coffee*, the bankruptcy court approved the fees of
11 counsel to four related debtors. It had been argued that because the interests of the
12 several debtors are, in some respects, in conflict, the debtors’ counsel should be denied
13 any compensation under § 328(c). The court observed that it had become apparent since
14 counsel’s initial employment that a conflict exists as to some matters. However, no party
15 had sought the removal of counsel or, until the hearing on interim compensation, voiced
16 any concern. The court reasoned that it would be “completely unfair to disqualify
17 counsel from all compensation on this account. I am satisfied that counsel has moved
18 and will continue to move promptly to avoid any foreseeable conflicts of interest.”¹³

19 Here, as in *Guy Apple Masonry* and *General Coffee*, the circumstances clearly
20 establish that the equities favor approval of the Application and a finding of the lack of
21 any prejudice to the estates, as set forth below.

22 ¹¹ *Id.* at 166-67 (emphasis added).

23 ¹² 39 B.R. 7 (Bankr. S.D. Fla. 1984). *See also In re Global Marine, Inc.*, 108 B.R. 998 (Bankr. S.D. Tex.
24 1987) (the mere existence of intercompany claim between parent-holding company and its subsidiary did
25 not show actual conflict of interest by law firm representing both parent and subsidiary in consolidated
26 chapter 11 proceedings which required disqualification of law firm from representing either party;
27 corporations had agreed to dual representation, and there was no showing of any instance in which dual
28 representation had caused any injury to estate of subsidiary).

¹³ *Id.* at 8.

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1 **1. The Firm Has Successfully Served as an “Honest Broker” to Balance**
2 **the Competing Interests of the Two Estates to the Benefit of All**
3 **Parties**

4 These cases involved a significant number of competing interests as between
5 lenders, creditors and equity holders. Moreover, the UST appointed two unsecured
6 creditors’ committees – one for each estate. Accordingly, the number of parties with
7 their separate professionals at the table is larger than a typical case. Naturally, the two
8 creditors’ committees maintained competing interests – alongside the interests of
9 Washington Trust Bank, Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc., Segale, various lenders including
10 Prudential, Equitable and others, as well as the Easterday family. The Debtors have
11 benefited from PSZJ’s vast restructuring experience enabling them to effectively serve
12 as an honest broker, to maintain peace, and to keep these cases from spiraling out of
13 control given the various competing interests.

14 **2. The Compensation Sought Is Commensurate with the Amount**
15 **Involved and the Results Achieved**

16 Ultimately, notwithstanding the overall contentious nature of these chapter 11
17 cases, the global settlement and plan were overwhelmingly either supported or
18 unopposed by the parties in interest, including the Official Committees of Unsecured
19 Creditors of the Debtors, Tyson, Segale, Washington Trust Bank, and the Easterday
20 family.

21 The plan negotiations required sophisticated and experienced corporate
22 restructuring counsel. The Debtors conducted simultaneous negotiations with multiple
23 parties that were extremely complex. These negotiations necessarily drew upon PSZJ’s
24 expertise and the factual and legal issues developed over the several months of their
25 representation of the Debtors.

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1 The Debtors' strategy and diligence, as assisted in part by PSZJ, were rewarded
2 when the global settlement was reached. Additionally, the Debtors' strategy with
3 PSZJ's continued representation reaped further dividends when the Plan was confirmed.

4 The outcome of these cases will enable payment in full of Farms' unsecured
5 creditors and a significant distribution to Ranches' unsecured creditors. There has been
6 no objection to the reasonableness of PSZJ's fees other than the UST's Objection.

7 **3. Key Constituencies in These Cases – All of Which Executed the**
8 **Global Resolution – Were Represented by Skilled Counsel**
9 **Throughout the Plan Negotiations**

10 Key constituents in these cases all hired skilled law firms and financial advisors,
11 among them Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, B. Riley Advisory Services, Buchalter,
12 Cooley LLP, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, Dundon Advisers LLC, Perkins Coie LLP,
13 and Stoel Rives LLP.

14 **4. PSZJ Was Duly Employed by the Bankruptcy Court Upon Full**
15 **Disclosure of All Relevant Connections**

16 PSZJ's employment was duly filed and approved by the bankruptcy court
17 pursuant to Bankruptcy Code section 327(a). There is no contention that PSZJ failed to
18 disclose any relevant connections in connection with its employment application.

19 **5. The Other Two Law Firms Employed by the Debtors Joint Counsel**
20 **Presumably Have the Same Purported Disqualifying Conflict as**
21 **PSZJ Yet the UST Inexplicably Solely Objected to PSZJ's Fees**

22 As noted above, the UST has not objected to the fees of Bush Kornfeld LLP or
23 Davis Wright Tremaine LLP despite the fact that they would have the same
24 disqualifying conflicts of interest as PSZJ.

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1 **C. Each of the Cases Cited by the UST Have No Bearing on the Issues.**

2 The cases cited by the UST in the Objection are not even remotely on point. *Rome*
3 *v. Braunstein*, 19 F.3d 54 (1st Cir. 1994), involved counsel who, while he was
4 representing a corporate chapter 11 debtor, also simultaneously represented the debtor's
5 sole shareholder against whom the debtor held claims for prepetition looting and one of
6 the debtor's former officers as purchaser of assets from the debtor's estate. Counsel
7 filed three aborted plans of reorganization on behalf of the debtor, none of which was
8 confirmed. The court disqualified counsel on the grounds of his failure to make full and
9 spontaneous disclosure of the financial transactions among the debtor, its sole
10 shareholder and family members shortly before counsel filed the chapter 11 petition or
11 to obtain court authorization to represent the debtor's former officer in connection with
12 the section 363 sale. Notably, the First Circuit acknowledged that in certain cases the
13 bankruptcy court could allow fees of conflicted counsel if it found, "in the sound
14 exercise of its discretion, that any potential impairment of its institutional integrity, or
15 risk of divided loyalty by counsel, was substantially outweighed by the benefits to be
16 derived from counsel's continued representation of multiple entities or the
17 impracticability of disentangling multiple interests 'without unreasonable delay and
18 expense.'" *Id.* at 63 n.3.

19 In *In re Land*, 116 B.R. 798 (D. Col. 1990), an attorney was paid a prepetition
20 retainer by the debtors and for years represented the debtors in exchange for payment
21 by the debtors' relatives but failed to file an employment application until compelled to
22 do so by the bankruptcy court. When the attorney finally filed the application *nunc pro*
23 *tunc*, the court ordered disgorgement of fees based on a lack of extraordinary
24 circumstances justifying the attorney's delay in filing the application.

25 In *Security Pacific Bank Washington v. Steinberg (In re Westwood Shake &*
26 *Shingle, Inc.)*, 971 F.2d 387 (9th Cir. 1992), the Ninth Circuit dismissed an appeal of a

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1 district court's order affirming a bankruptcy court order approving employment of
2 special litigation counsel over objection that counsel was conflicted by its dual
3 representation of the debtor's principals in the state court litigation. In dicta, the Ninth
4 Circuit stated that if counsel was not disinterested, the bankruptcy court could waive
5 counsel's fees under section 328(c).

6 Next, *Adorno & Yoss LLP v. United States Tr. (In re 3DFX Interactive, Inc.)*,
7 2008 Bankr. LEXIS 4702 (9th Cir. BAP Feb. 6, 2008), involved the disqualification of
8 special litigation counsel to a creditors committee on the grounds that it also represented
9 a creditor in litigation against the trustee that, if the trustee prevailed, would generate
10 recovery for creditors.

11 Finally, each of the cases *In re Wheatfield Bus. Park LLC*, 286 B.R. 412 (Bankr.
12 C.D. Cal. 2002), *In re McKinney Ranches Assoc.*, 62 B.R. 249 (Bankr. C.D. Cal. 1986),
13 and *Interwest Business Equip. v. United States Trustee (In re Interwest Business*
14 *Equip.)*, 23 F.3d 311 (10th Cir. 1994), are also inapposite. None of these cases involved
15 a section 328(c) motion but rather whether a joint representation of debtors should be
16 approved.

17 None of the UST's cases involve the application of Bankruptcy Code section
18 328(c) to complex, multiple debtor representations that were approved by the court and
19 where the interests of the various constituencies have their own counsel. Here, not only
20 were the representations previously approved and all parties had their own sophisticated
21 counsel, but they also coalesced in support of the confirmed chapter 11 plan just as
22 hoped by the Debtors at the outset of their retention of PSZJ to handle these matters.

23 III.

24 CONCLUSION

25 WHEREFORE, for all of the foregoing reasons, and such additional reasons as
26 may be advanced at or prior to the hearing regarding the Application, the Debtors

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1 respectfully request (a) the entry of an Order approving the Application, and (b) such
2 other and further relief as the court may deem just and proper.

3 Dated: October 3, 2022

BUSH KORNFELD LLP

4 /s/ Thomas A. Buford, III

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12 *in Possession*

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